

Dear Science and Technology Policy Office,

Thank you for extending the deadline for comments on Public Access to Peer-Reviewed Scholarly Publications Resulting From Federally Funded Research.

Like many of my colleagues I wasn't aware of the call until the initial deadline had passed. Knowing now that comments are requested, I am moved to write by the appearance of the Research Works Act.

I think that most scientists, like me, assumed that this battle was over: that the right and natural claim of the general population to have access to the results of work that they had funded was so self-evident that no-one would think to challenge it. Certainly the open-access mandates adopted by funding bodies such as the NIH and research institutions such as Harvard and MIT indicate that this is the case. If there has been a weak response to the OSTP's call RFI, that is the reason: we have assumed the issue was as settled as, say, slavery or women's suffrage.

But now that the Research Works Act has been proposed, it's apparent that there are still parties wanting to drag the whole scientific enterprise back to the dark age of walled gardens, and so apparently it is necessary to make the argument AGAIN that publicly funded research should benefit the public rather than the shareholders of monopolist profiteering foreign corporations.

As simply as possible, then: long-term stewardship and broad public access to the peer-reviewed scholarly publications that result from federally funded scientific research can best be achieved by having science funding bodies make it a condition of their grants that the resulting research papers be published as open access, in accordance with the standard definition of that term found in the Budapest Open Access Initiative: "free availability on the public internet, permitting any users to read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of these articles, crawl them for indexing, pass them as data to software, or use them for any other lawful purpose, without financial, legal, or technical barriers other than those inseparable from gaining access to the internet itself. The only constraint on reproduction and distribution, and the only role for copyright in this domain, should be to give authors control over the integrity of their work and the right to be properly acknowledged and cited." (See <http://www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/boaifaq.htm#openaccess>)

The existence of an act like the RWA, so clearly contrary to the interests of the American people and the wider world, is only possible due to self-interested lobbying by for-profit publishers who continue to leech off the work of scientists. For example, Elsevier, who contributed campaign funds to both RWA co-sponsors, posted a profit of 36% of revenue in 2010, as reported in the Economist at <http://www.economist.com/node/18744177/> -- in part by accepting manuscripts produced by publicly funded US scientists, assuming copyright, and selling expensive copies back to publicly funded US institutions. Such a business model serves no-one but the publishers

themselves, and must not be allowed to receive support from US legislation.

(The language in the RWA is highly misleading, attributing to publishers far more input into the scientific process than they really have. The truth is that scientists -- often funded by public money -- provide the underlying research, the writing and the figure preparation that result in a manuscript submitted for publication.

Other scientists then provide the editorial services and – contra publishers' claims, as can be easily verified -- the peer review. Publishers' contributions are limited essentially to typesetting and web hosting.)

To summarise, I strongly support the continuation of open-access mandates by US funding bodies (and those of other countries) because they are morally right, economically advantageous, and without any drawbacks whatsoever to the progress of science.

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